

Landmarks Preservation Commission
May 13, 1980, Designation List 133
LP-1070

180 EAST 73RD STREET BUILDING, Borough of Manhattan.
Built 1890-91; architect William Schickel & Co.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1407, Lot 42.

On June 19, 1979, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the 180 East 73rd Street Building and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 20). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. One witness spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The 180 East 73rd Street Building is a fine example of the type of private carriage house built during the late 19th and early 20th centuries in this area of Manhattan. Constructed between 1890 and 1891 for Max Nathan who lived at 22 East 72nd Street, the building was designed by the architectural firm of William Schickel & Co. in a transitional Romanesque Revival/neo-Renaissance style that is typical of the early 1890s.

The carriage house at No. 180 is a component of the rare surviving group of carriage houses, stables, and garages built on East 73rd Street between Lexington and Third Avenues to serve the wealthy families who lived on or near Fifth Avenue. Stables were a necessity during the period when private urban transportation was limited to horses and carriages. Only the very wealthy, however, could afford to build and maintain a private carriage house such as most of those found on this street. Others boarded their horses in large commercial stables such as that at 182 East 73rd Street.

The private carriage houses tended to be two- or three-story structures often designed in the most stylish architectural modes of the period. On the interior were two major ground-floor spaces--a front room for the carriages and a rear room with stalls for the horses. At the upper stories were one or two apartments for the coachman, groom, or related employees. Some of the larger carriage houses had interior ramps on the ground floor that led to additional horse stalls on the second floor. Early in the 20th century, as automobiles began to replace carriages as the primary means of transportation for the wealthy, these stables were converted to garages and chauffeur's residences. Later in the 20th century, when private garages became too expensive to maintain, most of the buildings were converted to stylish residences.

The carriage houses were built on streets which were convenient to the East Side mansions, but were not so close that their noises and smells would mar the exclusive character of the residential streets. A few carriage houses were erected between Madison and Park Avenues; but most were constructed on the less elegant streets east of Park Avenue. Like many streets on the Upper East Side, East 73rd Street between Lexington and Third Avenues was initially developed in the 1860s with modest Italianate style residences. Most of these houses were replaced as the block became a prime site for carriage houses; only two of the original rowhouses (Nos. 171 and 175) survive.

The building at No. 180 is designed in a form characteristic of contemporary carriage houses. A three-story structure with a stone ground floor and brick upper stories, the carriage house has a lower floor faced with heavy Romanesque Revival style blocks of rock-faced limestone. Three flat-arched openings--a central vehicular entrance, a pedestrian entrance, and a window with an iron guard--relieve the severe quality of this portion of the facade. The pedestrian entrance retains an extremely fine original door ornamented by a wrought-iron window guard and a cast-iron mail slot. All of the openings are topped by large splayed voussoirs. A smooth, limestone ribbon cartouche inscribed with the initials MN (for Max Nathan) has been carved into the facade above the vehicular entrance.

The upper stories are faced with brick in three shades--a dark yellow brick at the second floor, a light yellow brick at the third floor, and a brown brick trim used to form simulated quoins and for the window surrounds. The windows are recessed within foliate terra-cotta frames that are surrounded by brick arches with terra-cotta keystones. Alternating dark and light bricks add emphasis to the windows. A terra-cotta modillioned cornice is embellished by a frieze with incised twisting lines and anthemion forms and is crowned by a brick parapet.

The carriage house was designed by William Schickel & Co., one of New York's most active late 19th-century architectural firms. William Schickel (1850-1907) was a native of Germany. In 1870 he immigrated to New York and worked as a draftsman before establishing his own office in the 1880s. Schickel worked extensively for the German-American community, designing such notable German institutions as the Ottendorfer Library and the German Dispensary at 135 and 137 Second Avenue (1883-84). On the Upper East Side, Schickel designed St. Ignatius Loyola R.C. Church (1895-1900) on Park Avenue and a carriage house at 153 East 69th Street (1883-84).

Like Schickel, Max Nathan, the original owner of the carriage house, was a German immigrant. Nathan (1829-1922) came to America as a child, settling with his family in Cincinnati. He remained in Cincinnati until 1870 when he moved to New York. Nathan was the president of Nathan & Co., a manufacturer of railroad equipment, founded in the 1870s. For his work on the railways Nathan was one of the few people ever to receive an honorary membership in the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers.

In 1922 the carriage house was purchased by George D. Widener (1889-1971) who lived at 5 East 70th Street, a house that was demolished in 1974 for the expansion of the Frick Collection. Widener was the heir to the Philadelphia trolley-car fortune founded by his grandfather Peter A.B. Widener and an owner of thoroughbred race horses.

The carriage house is now used for commercial purposes and the original carriage entry has been transformed into a doorway and show window. Other than this alteration the building retains its original architectural form. It is one of the finest of the carriage houses that give East 73rd Street between Lexington and Third Avenues its unique character and it remains a tangible reminder of a lost lifestyle in which wealthy families could afford to maintain private carriage houses.

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FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the 180 East 73rd Street Building has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the 180 East 73rd Street Building is a fine example of a late 19th-century carriage house; that it is a beautifully massed transitional Romanesque Revival/neo-Renaissance style structure; that it is faced with subtle polychromatic brickwork with terra-cotta ornamentation; that it was designed by a prominent New York architect, William Schickel, who worked extensively for the German-American community; that the building, a rare survivor, is a reminder of an elegant lifestyle that has passed; that it was owned by important New Yorkers including the German-American manufacturer Max Nathan and the trolley-car heir George D. Widener; and that the carriage house is a vital component of the unusual group of buildings on East 73rd Street between Lexington and Third Avenues.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 21 (formerly Chapter 63) of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 8-A of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the 180 East 73rd Street Building Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 1407, Lot 42, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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180 East 73rd Street
Architect: William Schickel & Co.

Photo Credit: Gina Santucci

Built: 1890-91